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CANON LAW vs. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

A SERMON

PREACHED BY REV. ROBERT PATTERSON, D.D., IN JEFFERSON PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO, ON SABBATH, AUGUST 1, 1869.

STAND FAST THEREFORE IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HAS MADE US FREE, AND BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.—*Galatians* v. 1.

THE Church of our Lord Jesus Christ consists of all true believers, and is one body. Every part is interested in the welfare of every other part. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. If one congregation tolerates any public sin, it is a scandal and a weakness to the whole Church. If any part of the Church assumes to cast out any true Christian for refusal to comply with commandments of men, not contained in the Word of God, all the rest of the Church is wounded and injured by such tyranny, and shares in the reproach thus provoked against Christianity. When a minister of the Church of Christ is brought before an ecclesiastical court, and prosecuted with intent to deprive him of his office, not upon any charge of immorality of conduct, nor yet of heresy of doctrine, but because in conducting the public worship he refuses to be tied to the words of forms made by fallible men centuries ago, every minister of Christ, is assaulted, and Christian liberty itself is assailed. It is no meddlesome interference in other men's matters for his Christian neighbors to examine, or expose, the unwarrantable character of such an

invasion of the rights of Christ, the only Law-giver of his Church, and of the liberties which he has guaranteed to all Christians. The silence of other denominations in view of such a procedure would be justly construed into a tacit approval; it would be either shameful cowardice, or sinful treason against the freedom of the Christian Commonwealth. Christians and ministers, of other denominations than Episcopal, are therefore bound by our common brotherhood in Christ to take notice of the prosecution of Mr. Cheney for omitting the word "regenerate," when reading the baptismal service for infants, from the prayer book of his church, in this city, and to protest against the misapprehensions of the nature of Christianity which this prosecution will occasion in the minds of our infidel fellow-citizens, as though Christianity consisted in the use of every word of a particular prayer book.

The necessity by a public discussion of this subject becomes still more apparent from a consideration of the spirit which prompts this prosecution. Were the prosecutors animated by a sincere veneration for the prayer book which would inspire every word and jot and tittle of it with divine authority, and regard the punctilious use of every syllable as necessary to salvation as the Papist's *Ho est corpus meum*, we must respect the devotion, while we mourn over the superstition of such idolatry of a book. But no such respect for the prayer book is manifested by these maintainers of its perfection. On the contrary they are the people above all others who add and eke, and alter and amend, and omit services innumerable at their pleasure. Let any man attend a High Church service, and compare it with the prayer book, and he will search in vain for one-half of the performances he witnesses; but he will never hear of any prosecution of the performers for non-conformity to the prayer book. He will behold with amazement multitudes of the youth of so-called Protestant Churches admiring these theatricals, and going through all the processions, retreats, genuflexions and crossings,

and even bowing down before altars, crosses, candles and pictures, trained, with the consent and approval of the authorities, in a course of innovations and amendments of the service of the prayer book wisely adapted to educate the rising generation into the whole ritual of Popish idolatry and superstition. It is thus made evident that the prayer book may be altered in the interest of Popery without offense; it is only Gospel amendments that are proscribed. Such an apostacy, predicted in prophecy, has been rendered practicable by the neglect of the ministry to discuss the great principles of free Christian worship as distinguished from the bondage of ecclesiastical superstition. But history repeats itself, and we are to-day called again to investigate the very same questions which our Puritan and Covenanting ancestors discussed so seriously that we had fondly supposed them settled forever. The question now to be settled between Mr. Cheney and his Bishop is precisely the question which our Puritan and Covenanting fathers discussed with the Bishops of their day—their right to impose liturgies and ceremonies upon the Church of Christ. We ought to feel an interest in this question; it has cost us dear. Our fathers, because they resisted such impositions, were banished fron their native land to find a home amid the winter snows and hostile savages of New England, and others of them were sold as slaves to the planters of the Jerseys and of Barbadoes. It is the old issue of the Puritans and Reformers, with the hierarchy of their day—canon law, or Christian liberty.

But we have a closer interest than even this instinct of our race in the question. It is a present issue in the Presbyterian as well as in the Episcopal Church. It is a startling illustration of the truth of Luther's saying, that every man is born a Papist, to find the descendants of those very Puritans and Covenanters who suffered banishment and death because they asserted that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any wise contrary to

his word, or beside it, in matters of religion," and because they denied the power of the church "to decree rites and ceremonies," to behold, I say, the descendants of these very martyrs for liberty of conscience themselves decreeing and imposing rites and ceremonies, liturgies not commanded in the Word of God, and expelling from their communion Christians who refuse to be bound by such impositions. It is well known that several Presbyterian denominations claim the right to compose or compile a liturgy of praise, a hymn-book, to bind their congregations to sing no other hymns, neither in their own churches nor in any other place, and to excommunicate either presbyters or people who refuse compliance with this commandment. That wonderful providence of development which always, by a divine omnipotence, urges principles into practice, impelled the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, after a year's deliberate discussion of the proposal, to expel from his seat in Synod, and from the communion of that body, one of its most distinguished and useful members, Mr. George H. Stuart, of Philadelphia, because he had sung hymns not contained in the hymn-book of the sect, and refused to confess this as a sin, and to promise to abstain from it in the future; and because he had recognized other evangelical hymn-singing denominations as churches of Christ by communing with them at the Lord's Table. It was not alleged that there was any text in Scripture commanding the Synod to compose and impose Rouse's Scotch metrical paraphrase of the Book of Psalms, which they have selected as their hymn-book, or, indeed, any metrical psalmody whatever; it was simply an assertion of Church power. Rouse's paraphrase is as unknown to Scripture as the prayer book; both are simply human inventions for the better edification of the Church. The Reformed Presbyterian Synod must take the same ground as Bishop Whitehouse, that the Church has power to invent and impose rites, ceremonies and liturgies, and to punish by excommunication all presbyters and people

who deviate at all from the prescribed rubric. The Bishop and the Synod are agreed in this principle.

We are aware that some able and serious writers vindicate this excommunication of all dissidents from the prescribed formula of the sect, on the lower ground of breach of contract. They allege that each sect of Christians is a voluntary association, having a right to frame its own terms of communion; that it is optional with every man which sect he will attach himself to, and he may select out of the endless variety of denominations one that suits him; or, if he finds none exactly to his mind, he may originate one that will be so; but that while he remains in the sect he is bound strictly to conform to its minutest requirements, and can have no cause of complaint if he be excluded for transgressing the terms of communion to which he has given his voluntary adhesion, and that when a person becomes convinced of the impropriety of any of the ceremonies or services of any church, his only resource is to quit its communion and connect himself with some other sect, as at once a matter of conscience and convenience. This idea of the very slight inconvenience of changing one's church, is the reason of the great indifference of serious minds to ecclesiastical usurpations.

We object to every part of this statement. In the first place, neither we, nor those with whom we remonstrate for these usurpations, recognize any such degrading state of the church as this. The unhappy divisions of the church by no means reduce it to a joint stock company. The Church of Christ is no such heterogeneous collection of voluntary societies, any of which a man may join or decline at his pleasure, or go from one to the other, as he might frequent this or that barber's shop or coffee-house without serious inconvenience. The church is no more a voluntary association than the State is; men are born in it, and born to privileges in it; and it is at their peril, and to their damage, that they leave it, either voluntarily or under compulsion. Our rights and privileges in the church are

no more matters of contract with the church rulers, than our civil rights are matters of contract with the Governor of the State; they are guaranteed to us before we were capable of making any contracts; in the one case by Christ the Head of the Church; in the other by the Constitution. To impose upon the people, as a condition of the enjoyment of their rights, any contract unwarranted in the Constitution is usurpation and tyranny. When Brigham Young compels the citizens of Utah to sign contracts recognizing his authority as their chief priest and prophet, binding themselves to pay him tithes of their produce, and to obey his pretended revelations, as the condition of their enjoying the settlers land grants, to which the laws of the United States entitle them without any such conditions, would any one argue that as soon as one of his disciples discovered the invalidity of his authority, he was bound by his contract to leave his farm and his family to Young's control, and go out relinquishing his birthright and his privileges as a citizen of the United States? The contract must be first proved lawful, and the authority of the imposer warranted, before it can be alleged as of force in defining the duty of the citizen. If the Governor has no warrant for imposing any covenant of the kind, no court will sustain him in enforcing any such contracts? So if any contract is alleged in the church, of the nature of a covenant between the rulers and the people, it must be shown to be warranted by the Constitution. If a despot, or usurper of Christ's power, arise in the church, and impose unwarranted covenants upon the people as the condition of the enjoyment of their just rights, this usurpation is a crime against Christ and His Church, and the usurper cannot come into court and plead his crime as a warrant for the further crime of casting Christians out of the church. It must be first shown that the terms of the alleged contract are presented by Christ as a condition of church membership before any such contract can be recognized as binding in this case. One usurpation can never

justify another either in Church or State, nor can any man's consent or submission to an unconstitutional law justify the ecclesiastical court in enforcing that law and inflicting the unconstitutional penalty it prescribes. All Church covenants must be subordinate to the covenant of grace else they are null and void. Unscriptural terms of communion cannot authorize the excommunication of Christians. The church does not belong to the synod or the clergy; it is Christ's.

In the second place the alleged remedy by removal to another sect of Christians is neither efficient, nor rightly available. No church has a right to cast out her children causelessly from her own house, and then tell them they will find shelter in some other house. It is no slight sorrow to any serious Christian to be compelled to forsake the fellowship of the brethren among whom he was born, with whom he spent the sacred hours of childhood's holy joy, with whom he took sweet counsel and went in company to the house of God, and with whom he broke the symbol of their common Redeemer's broken body, and drank together of the cup of the Lord. A man can have but one mother, or one mother church; no future connection with other denominations can supply its place. We do not choose our church; God chooses it for us, as He does our country; we are born in it—spiritually or naturally. The great majority of Christians are born naturally in the Church, and generally belong to that denomination in which they were born, and have all their dearest sympathies and fellowships associated with its people and practices. It is a hardship, an infliction of suffering of no small amount, and most keenly felt by the most refined minds, and by the most honorable characters, to be expelled, either with cool and silent contempt or open and public contumely, from that portion of the family of Christ in which He has given them a birthright. It is often, we know, a greater evil, an evil which some have felt insufferable, to be allowed to remain in church privi-

lege, yet deprived of brotherly love, to be continually harassed with janglings and strifes, to have the family circle embroiled, to have the cup of communion embittered with jealousy and dislike; to avoid such a perversion of Christian communion, many have been compelled to seek that fellowship among strangers which was denied them by their own mother church. We deny, however, the right of any church of Christ to require this so-called voluntary expatriation of any true Christian, by letters of dismissal to another sect, on account of mere difference of sentiment about ceremonies of worship. If he is fit for fellowship in any other church he is fit for fellowship in his own.

Again, we deny the right of any church to ask any other to admit her expelled members to fellowship. What a gross insult to a sister church to say, "Brethren, this brother has proven himself unworthy of communion with us as a church of Christ, but he may be good enough for your society, and therefore we commend him to you." Has any church the right to take advantage of its neighbor's wrong in allowing an unscriptural laxity of discipline—for this wrong is the alleged ground of its separate denominational organization—and to help, by its letters, to extend this sinful laxity of discipline? Show any Scripture making provision for conflicting terms of church fellowship among different congregations of Christians, before you can appeal to such an arrangement, in defense of sectarianism. The man who is lawfully and rightly excluded from any church is thereby disqualified for church membership in every church in Christendom. Where does Christ order one church to exclude a man for any sin, and another church to receive him without repentance? No principle of common sense or Holy Scripture acknowledges the propriety of admitting to church fellowship, in a congregation across the street, a man justly excluded from the church in which he was born. A church may not plead its sister's sins as an apology for its own.

These principles apply equally to presbyters as to people. The rights of the presbyter are as sacred as those of the church member. The church has no more right to impose unwarranted terms of communion upon a minister than upon a layman. Higher qualifications are demanded, both by reason and Scripture, for a teacher than for a learner in the school of Christ; but it is Christ, himself alone, who can demand them. Unwarranted terms of communion do not become in any degree sanctified by the consent of a council of clergymen. Whatever qualifications Christ has prescribed in Scripture as the conditions of exercising official powers, these, and no others, may the church prescribe to her clergy. No agreement of councils, or cannons of conventions, nor consent of clergy, though a hundred times repeated in ordination vows, can ever render the imposition of engagements unwarranted by Scripture anything save a high crime against the liberty of the church, and a bold usurpation of the rights of the Lord Christ, her only lawgiver.

Christ has prescribed only one set of ministerial qualifications. Every church is bound to apply the same terms of ministerial fellowship; for we have only one Bible, one ministry, one Gospel, one church, given us by Christ. We may not drive out a minister or an elder from our communion, because he will not comply with our terms, and then say to him, "You can go and exercise your ministry in some other denomination." If we have justly deprived him of his ministry he may not exercise it in any place or society whatever. A minister justly deposed by one branch of the church has no right to act as a minister in any other denomination. There is no alternative between the assertion of the unity of the Church of Christ, and the assumption that Christ has authorized the imposition of as many sets of terms of ministerial and Christian communion as there are sects of Christians. No sect can plead any sectarian prerogative to abridge the Christian liberty of its ministers; all Evangelical Churches stand on the

same level; none possesses any exclusive authority, or can show any warrant from Scripture for special powers of legislation. If one church may depose a minister for an alteration or omission from the prayer book or psalm book, so may every church, and so *must* every church, for there is only one rule of discipline in the Bible.

We come back, therefore, to the question, has the synod or convention of any church a right to compose a liturgy and rubric of worship—consisting of forms of prayer and praise and ceremonial directions for administering the sacraments, not commanded in Scripture—and to impose the use of this liturgy and rubric upon the ministers and people, excommunicating those who will not confine themselves strictly to it? The question is not, you will please take notice, whether forms of prayer and praise, or liturgies generally, are warranted in Scripture or not; but whether the imposition of their exclusive use is waranted. We do not now dispute the propriety of the clergy composing or recommending hymn books and prayer books to their people, but their authority to impose the use of them as a term of communion in the church. The question is not, whether Rouse's hymns, or Watts' hymns, or any other such collection, is Scriptural and edifying; but admitting its excellence, whether the three or four score, more or less, of ministers and elders who meet in synod from year to year, in New York, Pittsburgh, Xenia and elsewhere, have authority from Christ to select such a collection, and to impose it on the whole body of the church as their only psalmody, and to excommunicate any presbyter or member who sings any other songs of praise? The question is not whether the prayer book of the Episcopal Church needs revision, or whether the word "regenerate" should be dropped out of the baptismal service, as I think it should, but granting that the book was as well revised and amended as it is possible for fallible men to amend it, whether the Bishops and presbyters who should happen to meet in convention and approve it, have

authority from Christ to impose it on all the rest of the church, ministers and people, so that they shall never alter a word of it, no more than if it were the word of God, on pain of excommunication ? The question is not about the right of any Christian to use any psalm book or liturgy he believes to be scriptural or edifying ; but about his right to impose the use of it upon other people, and to cast them out of the church if they deviate from it in a single word.

We deny the right of any Convention or Synod to impose a liturgy on the church, and to excommunicate either presbyter or people who may refuse to be confined to its exclusive use.

Our all-sufficient reason for denying the authority of uninspired men to compile liturgies, and to compel the church to use them, is that they can show no authority from Christ to do so. We enter into no question here about apostolical succession, the authority of Bishops or anything of that kind ; we take our stand upon the common Christian platform that Holy Scripture is the only rule of faith and worship, "so that nothing is to be required of any Christian man to be believed or practiced, but what is written therein, or may be proved thereby." If any interested in this discussion have another rule of faith or worship, we cannot now enter on the discussion of that subject. We assert, then, that there is no text of Holy Scripture commanding the convention to compile a prayer book, or the synod to compile or select a hymn book, or to versify certain Scriptures, and to impose the exclusive use of such a version or such a prayer book upon the church. We assert that there is no example of the presbyters and delegates of any of the Apostolic Churches meeting in convention, or synod, for any such business, nor of their excommunicating any presbyter for using hymns, prayers or forms of service not contained in the authorized book. If any such precept or example is to be found in Scripture, let it be produced.

It will not answer the purpose to appeal to the com-

mandment of Hezekiah to the Levites (2 Chronicles xxix. 25–30) to sing the words of David and Asaph with the music of cymbals, harps, and trumpets, and to offer the burnt offerings according to the law. The psalm-singing churches which quote this command of the Jewish King do not pay the least attention to it; on the contrary, they detest and denounce the use of cymbals, trumpets, harps, and burnt sacrifices in the Christian worship, as Jewish, carnal, obsolete, and abolished by the sacrifice of Christ. But if Hezekiah's commandment has any authority in the Christian Church, we must be consistent, and obey the command as he gave it; psalms, psalteries, and sacrifices are equally commanded, and equally obligatory. If, on the other hand, the command of the Jewish King to the Levites concerning the temple worship is of no authority in the Church of Christ, it can enforce neither psalm book nor sacrifice. All evangelical churches admit that the whole system of the Levitical worship is set aside by the more spiritual Christian system, which ignores forms and rituals. The same principle applies to the commands of David and Solomon, sometimes cited in this connection, commanding the use of David's Psalms in the temple worship.

But let us do justice to the Mosaic ritual. It prescribed no exclusive liturgy. The Old Testament is ignorant of any such imposition; there is not a shadow of it in the law of Moses, though that was a religion of liturgy and rubric, and had a whole book of Leviticus full of directions for worship. The Church, in its infancy, needed a ceremonial nursing, and infant schooling, no longer demanded by Christians. It was distinguished from the gospel as a religion of law is distinguished from a religion of spirit; as the state of a servant is inferior to that of a son—a state of commandment and prescription, not of freedom. But Moses prescribed no prayer book for Israel. Every worshiper brought his own sacrifice, and laid his hands on its head, and confessed his own sins, in

his own words. No form of confession is laid down, even for Aaron when he confessed the sins of Israel, nor does Moses prescribe the litany he must use when he went into the most holy place to intercede with God for Israel. The notion of binding the clergy of the church to use only and invariably every word of a certain liturgy is a bigotry which would have astonished the Pharisees. The law of Moses was a liberal Christianity compared with such a bondage as that.

Nor did the law of Moses prescribe any hymn book for the Church. Every man and woman made his or her own hymns as he could; and Moses made a hymn or two, but never dreamed of binding Israel to sing nothing but his psalms. Indeed, neither the Israelitish Church then, nor the Reformed Presbyterian Church since, considered themselves at all bound to Moses' hymns; Hannah made one to suit herself; and the synod refused two of the three composed by Moses, though one of these they reject is sung by the church in heaven. "They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb;" neither of which do synod admit into their hymn book.

After many centuries of free song, David, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, wrote a number of psalms of such superior pathos and power, that they were used by the congregation in their public worship; and other inspired writers kept adding to the collection. But the exclusive use of David's Psalms was never imposed on Israel, much less on Gentile worshipers. On the contrary, we find Hezekiah, who was not an inspired prophet, but a very fallible ignorant sinner, writing hymns, and declaring his intention "to sing his songs to his stringed instruments all the days of his life in the house of the Lord."—Isaiah xxxviii. So we see there was no exclusive hymn book nor prayer book even under the Mosaic ceremony.

If such was the liberty of the Old Testament Church in the use of liturgies, we may well believe it would not be abridged by the greater privileges of the Gospel. Indeed,

the converts from heathenism never dreamed that they were bound to follow the Mosaic ritual, until the High Churchmen from Jerusalem introduced that heresy. So far from supposing that the Psalms of David were to be the only and exclusive liturgy of praise in the Church of Christ, the Corinthian Christians so abounded in songs of praise that the abundance of their hymns caused confusion. Every one of them, Paul says, had a psalm (1 Cor. xiv. 26). But he prescribes no ritual, no authorized version to cure the disorder; a little common sense and civility seem to him sufficient.

The epistle from which our text is taken is exceedingly emphatic on this subject. Far from asserting the necessity of liturgies, or the continued obligation of the Mosaic ritual, or of the temple worship, the whole epistle is an argument for the complete abolition of the whole Mosaic ceremony. Paul went out as a missionary among idolaters, preaching that they should turn from their idols to serve the living God; that whosoever believed in Christ should receive remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost, and organizing all who believed this gospel at once into churches. If ever there were churches needing to be strictly confined to the use of a liturgy, and in need of somebody to make a prayer book and a psalm book for them, we would say these new converts from idolatry, educated in the ideas of heathenism needed a liturgy. But Paul imposed no prayer book nor psalm book upon them; nor yet directed their ministers to meet in synod and compose and impose a liturgy. There is not a word of any such thing in his epistle. It was, indeed, most foreign to his thoughts, and contrary to all his ideas of Gospel worship.

He gave them what was infinitely better, the promise and the presence of the Holy Ghost, and the experience of his power in their hearts, lives and assemblies. Whenever any man received the Holy Ghost and became a new creature, he received that man to church membership; and

when he found men full of the Holy Ghost he set them apart to the ministry; but we read not of his requiring their adherence to books of forms of prayer and praise, or to any canons but one; namely, a new heart and a new life: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this canon, peace be on them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God."—Gal. vi. 15. Paul was an open communion minister; he did not value outward ceremonies, but when he found a true Christian he received him into his heart, and into his Church, never asking a question about hymn book or prayer book. Can we believe that the Episcopal Convention or the Reformed Presbyterian Synod have made a great improvement on Paul's simple Gospel?

Not merely does Paul ignore the duty of the church to compose and impose liturgies, rubrics and ceremonies of worship—he positively condemns and argues at length against certain persons who wanted to do so. There were ritualists in Paul's day, as well as in ours. They came down from Jerusalem and insisted on imposing on the converts from heathenism, all the High Church ceremonies of the Jewish worship, refusing communion to those who would not keep the Mosaic law. They had a much more plausible pretense for imposing the law of Moses than the convention can have for imposing their prayer book, or the synod for imposing their hymn book; since the prayer book and the hymn book are merely modern human inventions, but the Levitical rubric and liturgy were ancient divine institutions. But Paul expressly casts out the whole legal economy with all its belongings, as of no value now in the Church of Christ. He argues at length that this system of law and liturgy, and rubric and prescription, was only provisional, intended for the education of the Church in her childhood, but now, grown to maturity and come of age, Christians no longer need these leading strings. "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we

should be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster; for ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put into Christ. There is neither Greek nor Jew, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Now I say that the heir, so long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be Lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. Howbeit, then, when ye knew not God, ye did service to them which by nature are no gods; but now, after that ye have known God, or rather, are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"—Galatians iii. 23 to iv. 9. That is Paul's mode of speaking of ceremonies in the Church of Christ. Only imagine some one proposing to Paul that a man who has been taught by the Spirit to say, "Abba! Father!" should bind himself to a prayer book or psalm book, or to any other of these weak and beggarly elements of the church's childhood! Why, he would doubt whether that man knew what spiritual Christianity was, and would say, "I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." Our Ritualists, whether Presbyterian or Episcopal, are apostatizing from the free grace of the Gospel, and going back to Judaism.

Our Lord laid down a principle which completely over-

turns the compulsory and exclusive use of hymn books or prayer books, when He said, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshiper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him."—John iv. 23. God regards not the *words* of our prayers or praises, if they are not the truthful expression of our thoughts. What God desires from His worshipers is an humble sincere heart, and such words as truly express its feelings. When your little child is sick and cries to you for help, would you be any better inclined to hear her if she made a pompous speech, than if she simply spoke in her own childish tones of weakness? Our heavenly Father's heart is in no degree inclined to be favorable to us, His poor children, by the fine words we use in our prayers. He will not be in the least degree more attentive to a prayer uttered in the words of St. Chrysostom or St. Paul, than in your own words.

He gives His children His holy spirit to teach us to cry "Abba! Father!" and the prayer which He teaches is the acceptable prayer, whether it be uttered fresh from the soul or read from a book, whether in your own words, or St. Chrysostom's or St. Paul's. Your heavenly Father loves you as dearly as He loves St. Chrysostom or St. Paul. He gave His dear Son to die for you as much as for them; you have the very same right to the blood of Christ to cleanse you for his service, and to the intercession of Christ for your acceptance, which they had. It is not their worthiness, but Christ's righteousness and intercession, which secured the acceptance of their prayers; and your unworthiness shall never hinder the acceptance of yours if you put them in Christ's censer. The publican in the temple had no prayer book; but his cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" could not have been more successful if they had been the words of Abraham or David. Christ prescribes no forms of prayer or praise; He commands us to worship our heavenly Father in spirit and in truth.

Still, it is argued, the words of Scripture must be better

than our own words, since they are the words of God himself. That depends upon your truthful use of them. To use words in worship which do not express your feelings is falsehood and hypocrisy; but will it better the case to lie, like Satan, in God's words? Will sacrilege atone for hypocrisy? Even the words of God's own beloved Son became a terrible imprecation of doom in the mouth of the unforgiving petitioner. That is the reason why Christ imposes no liturgy of prayer or praise; it could not be always truly uttered by every member of his Church; and he will not have a lying liturgy, nor hypocritical hymns. To compel a man to read words of worship which he does not believe, is only to increase hypocrisy; and hypocrisy neither edifies man nor pleases God. Better speak truth in your own words than lie in Scripture phrases.

But some suppose that while in prayer we may use our own words, it would be a horrible sacrilege to use our own words in praise. Why so? Is it because of any difference which rhyme and meter and music make with God. If I sincerely speak the words of an acceptable prayer to God, will my chanting them to a tune so irritate him that he will punish the song as a sin? Does God dislike music? Such questions are quite worthy of the fetish worshipers of Apica, who offer worship for the edification of their deities.

We come then to this conclusion—that Christian worship is the truthful expression of Christian feelings and sentiments toward God, and that liturgies of prayer and praise are lawful so far as they help the united public expression of such sentiments. The New Testament contains no liturgy—either of prayer, praise, the administration of the sacraments, the marriage service, the funeral service, fast days, thanksgiving days—nor any directions for any church to compose any such thing. All churches have composed liturgies of some kind or other, and have altered and amended them at their discretion, thereby showing that they regarded them as simply conveniences, not as infalli-

ble oracles. The Episcopal Church has now in use the third prayer book since the Reformation, and the Church of Scotland is using the third collection of psalmody. The United Presbyterian Church here is engaged in a further revision of its hymns. All these revisions of the liturgy are intended to promote the better edification of the people, and so far as they do so are warrantable and proper. But these liturgies can claim no greater authority than the ground on which they stand; and the moment they become unedifying they cease to be obligatory. Possessing no warrant of divine authority, they must be treated like all other conventional arrangements in the Church with that respect due to their merits and usefulness as conveniences for conducting the worship of God decently; but they must not be set up as idols to be worshiped, and to which we must offer our first-born in sacrifice. Superstition is always making idols out of religious usages or ordinances. When the brazen serpent, by which God healed Israel, became an object of idolatrous reverence, Hezekiah brake it in pieces; and it were better every psalm book and prayer book in the visible Church were burnt, than that they became objects of such idolatrous respect that Christian men are excommunicated for any deviation from them. Woe! woe! to the Church when ceremonies of worship become terms of communion, and when the Christianity of genuine faith in Christ and a holy life are considered of less value than reverence for a psalm book or prayer book! The worship of dead men's bones will soon follow. Stand fast brethren in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free, and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage. Never allow psalm books or prayer books to become terms of communion in Christ's Church. For in Christ Jesus neither psalm books avail anything, nor prayer books avail anything, but faith which worketh by love. This is Christ's canon law, and as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God.